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Group denies CIA links in Indian work

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Wycliffe Bible Translators, more readily known by its secular name of Summer Institute of Linguistics in the numerous nations in which it does translation work, constantly has been badgered by leftist forces in those countries, the most common accusation being that its linguists serve as agents of the CIA.

Even though the allegations have been numerous and widely-publicized, the accusers and national probes which have followed, have failed to produce proof of the charges. Such aid, Wycliffe officials said, would prompt dismissal from the group.

Nonetheless, the same forces, spearheaded, as in the past by the press, now have resorted to attacking Indian groups formed to continue the spiritual and educational work Wycliffe has started — using much the same tactics.

When it was announced that a historic Indian gathering, drawn from 13 tribes over a wide range of the North American continent, would be held in the remote Mixe Indian town of San Jose de Paraiso in Mexico, several journalists in Mexico City and Oaxaca wrote that they would "make trouble" for the parley. Their threat, in the final analysis, failed to materialize but now that the group has made itself more concrete, renewed attacks are expected.

Dr. Dale Kietzman, a noted authority on American Indians, said, "The reason some journalists in Mexico City and Oaxaca openly wrote that they would cause trouble for this Christian gathering is that they knew that the Indians were forming an organization that will move in behind the Summer Institute of Linguistics."

"They even called the Indians attending such a meeting these numbers for the first time as 'followers of the Linguistic Institute,'" Mr. Kietzman said.

He explained that many of the Indians where Wycliffe/SIL has worked successfully reducing their heretofore spoken-only languages into writing and then translating the Scriptures and educational material into those languages, realize that Wycliffe some day may leave their areas.

"This new ministry organized by the Indians themselves could take the place of SIL, not to do translation work, as that is already completed, but instead, to distribute Christian literature and encourage evangelism among their own people," he said.

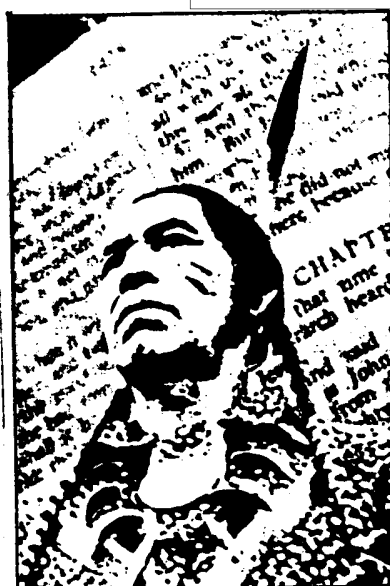
Instead of the anticipated assault on the meeting itself, the agenda moved forward, Mr. Kietzman said, and offered a vivid picture of the fruit of Wycliffe's efforts among the Indians. Several of the speakers had become Christians through the translation efforts of the Wycliffe linguists.

Included among them were Pablo Silva, who now is coordinator the Open Doors Mission for Mexico, with which Mr. Kietzman is associated, Claudio Iglesias, a Panamanian Kuna Indian, now Latin American coordinator for CHIEF (Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship) and Manuel Arenas, a Totonac Indian, who now heads the Totonac Bible Center in the state of Puebla, Mexico.

Speaking of the meeting in San Jose de Paraiso, Mr. Arenas said, "The townspeople took the delegates into their own homes as guests, and killed their cows to feed us. It was a most inspiring occasion and demonstrated that there is now a deep unity among Christian Indians in my country.

"We are a much-persecuted people — because we are Christian, and also because we are Indian. But we know the Lord is with us and this time together has really bound us more closely in faith and love."

Mr. Arenas, the epitome of the fruit of the ministry Wycliffe/SIL not only in the Americas but in Africa, Asia and Oceania, became a Christian through the linguists' efforts in his native Totonac village.



After learning to read his own language, which heretofore had been spoken only, he went on to Dallas Bible College and then to the University of Chicago. The son of a former headhunter, he earned his master's degree in education at the University of Erlangen in West Germany.

His newly established Totonac Bible Center is a school, clinic and an educational farm. But, as he puts it, "most of all, a place where Totonacs can learn new ways to gain new hope."

Several years ago, when SIL was under attack in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, as well as Mexico, it declared that none of its missionary force knowingly is an agent in any way for the CIA, and that it would be grounds for automatic dismissal from the group's ranks if such membership existed.

The world's largest missionary organization is headquartered in Huntington Beach, Calif., and has reduced to writing and translated the Scriptures into at least 500 languages since it was organized half a century ago by the late Dr. William Cameron Townsend, who began his efforts in Mexico.

Their effort is to reduce the more than 2,000 remaining languages to writing and to provide the speakers of those languages with at least a portion of the Scriptures in their native tongue.

— William F. Willoughby